

**County Council – 11 October 2016**

**Leader of the Council's Statement**

Madam Chairman, it is good to be back here with Members again and thank you to everyone for your kind wishes, cards and messages of support during the past few months - I really did appreciate it.

Can I also pay tribute to my Deputy, Peter Martin, for bridging the gap and holding the fort so well in my absence. As you may be aware, I had major heart surgery over the summer. When I was in the hospital, I had to face up to the possibility that I might not actually survive the operation. That is always a reality! Suddenly life could have stopped. In that moment, everything that mattered to me became clearer and I thought about what was really important to me. My wife, Anne, my family, my friends, being part of my local community and my role as a Councillor and as a Rotarian.

I had the chance to take stock of everything I was doing and everything I still hoped to achieve. I reflected on all of the decisions that led me here, all of the challenges and decisions that lie ahead. I know how life can take unexpected turns, and how, for some of us, it can change in an instant.

That is why I am so passionate that this Council is there to do the things that our residents expect from this Council and there when they suddenly need our support and our services. Just as importantly, that we strive to continue to improve our residents' lives day in, day out.

As individuals, each and every one of us has our own story and our own reason for becoming a councillor. We all share a genuine dedication to serving our residents and to making Surrey a better place to live and work.

It is now almost twenty five years since I became a Tandridge District Councillor but my drive to do the very best for those I represent is as strong today as it was way back in 1992. Experience has taught me that we are always going to be stronger and more effective as a team and that we make the best decisions after listening to everybody's views.

As I stand here, five years to the day after I made my first statement as the Leader of this Council, it is the right time to reflect on what we have achieved together so far. And also to understand the challenges that lie ahead of us.

Over the past five years, this County Council has delivered two international events:

Firstly, the Olympic road races during the London 2012 Olympics. It was not only a privilege to watch world top cyclists racing for glory across Surrey's magnificent countryside but we also honoured our promise to deliver a cycling legacy – the Ride London-Surrey Classic is now firmly embedded in the international cycling calendar.

Secondly, we hosted Her Majesty the Queen and the Prime Minister for a celebration of the 800th anniversary of the sealing of the Magna Carta on the Runnymede Meadows. It was a fantastic event commemorating our rich history and the fact that modern democracy was born right here, in Surrey.

These achievements show our vision, our talent and they demonstrate what is possible when we work together as ONE TEAM.

But what I am most proud of are the improvements that we, as the County Council, have made to the services our residents rely on - the ones that make a real difference in their day to day lives.

- We created 16,000 extra school places over the last 6 years – that is the equivalent of 38 large primary schools and we have plans for a further 11,000 extra school places by 2020. At the same time working with Surrey Teachers we raised standards across our schools – 93% of Surrey Schools are now rated either outstanding or good.
- We helped thousands of older people to carry on living in their own homes – 8,500 in the last year alone. This means the health service can free up essential resources while also ensuring our residents aren't being trapped unnecessarily in their hospital beds.
- We renewed hundreds of miles of the county's roads under Project Horizon and we are now well underway with the work to resurface our pavements.
- We bucked the national trend for library closures and kept all of our libraries open. Book loans are up 10% against national figures and we have achieved the milestone of two million junior fiction issues for the first time.
- And we delivered superfast broadband to an extra 86,000 properties which wouldn't otherwise have got it.

These are incredible achievements and there are many, many more which you can find in the booklet – 'More than 50 things Surrey County Council achieved in 2015-16'. But what is really impressive is that we did all of this whilst making savings of over £400m.

We should all feel incredibly proud of what we have achieved. Working together with our district and boroughs partners, our business community, the health and education services and alongside many of Surrey's volunteers, we created a stronger county. We could not have achieved any of this success without working as ONE team for Surrey and I believe it is much more important that we work together during difficult times.

I have stated that great challenges lie ahead of us. When I last addressed this Council, I made it clear that there was a limit to how much longer we can continue using efficiencies alone in order to bridge our funding gap. This year we forecast to make savings of over £80m. However, our capacity to make these savings is quite simply being outstripped by increasing demand and the rising cost of providing council services. We have squeezed the orange dry and there is nothing left.

As our population increases and ages, it is clear that we need to provide essential services for more and more residents, both young and old.

- The cost of providing adult social care services for the additional vulnerable residents in need of support, amounts to an additional £24m each year.
- The funding gap for Special Educational Needs services is expected to be £24m a year by the end of this decade.
- And the cost of creating the 11,000 extra school places required will amount to £30m.

We know increased demand is here to stay and that means we have to think very carefully about our financial sustainability, this year and in the coming years. This is absolutely our number one priority.

Members will no doubt be aware that as part of the Local Government Funding Settlement announced last Christmas, Councils were offered the chance to accept a four year financial deal from Government.

Under item 11 of this meeting, all Members have the opportunity to discuss our response. The Government requires our answer by the 14 October. Thus, it is crucial to hear Members' thoughts on this offer and I will be listening very carefully to comments across the chamber so we can all be sure that this decision is taken in the best interests of our residents.

Ensuring our finances remain sustainable also means we have to think carefully about how we choose to deliver our services, and with whom. This is particularly true for health and social care because keeping people healthy extends far beyond the individual responsibilities of today's separate health and care services. Especially when both of these services are feeling the significant strain of increasing demand and rising costs.

Having just had a major operation, I have never been more appreciative of the NHS. It is a highly-valued institution that plays a hugely important part in all of our lives. So it is important to make sure our health and care services are integrated and sustainable, because, at one stage or another, we will all rely on them. That is why I am pleased to announce that, following conversations with the Secretary of State for Health and the Head of NHS England, we are ready to move forward with devolved arrangements for the greater integration of health and social care through the Surrey Heartlands initiative. This will enable health and social care services to genuinely share their expertise, working across traditional boundaries and making the best use of their resources to deliver services locally. It is a big step towards the long-term sustainability of our health and care services.

Madam Chairman, the Prime Minister has laid out her vision.

- A vision for a fairer country.
- A vision for a society that works for everyone.
- And of course, that vision must mean Surrey residents too.

She has promised that great change is going to come and I am looking forward to that. I believe local Leaders can work with Government to achieve a society that works for everyone but only if government allows locally elected Leaders and Members to make local decisions about local services in order to meet the needs of local people, which, after all, is what residents believe they elected us to do.

Over the last 5 years, I am delighted that we have already improved the day to day lives for hundreds of thousands of Surrey residents. But the simple fact is that this Council needs long-term financial sustainability in the face of growing demand. Government needs to fund the growing gap of social care or alternatively allow the Council the ability to fund properly the social care needs of our residents.

So my ask of Government and our 11 Surrey MPs is this:

- **Work with us** to create a society that works for everyone in Surrey.
- **Help us** mend Surrey's creaking and overstretched infrastructure.
- **Provide us** with financial sustainability so that we can continue to meet the needs of Surrey's residents.
- **Or allow** us the freedom and responsibility to tackle the growing demand needs of local residents.
- **Trust us** to make the right choices for our County.

Then as ONE TEAM – we **will** play our part in delivering a society that works for everyone in Surrey.

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